

A STRIKING PICTURE

A republican paper directs attention to the great evils of the coal trust and yet, in suggesting a remedy, omits reference to the most effective of all weapons, the criminal clause of the anti-trust law.

The Philadelphia Public Ledger is a republican paper. An editorial in the Public Ledger of September 1 is entitled, "Coal: A Glut and a Famine." The Public Ledger, although evidently realizing that it is required to deal with a serious situation, seems to understand that it owes something to its famous reputation for "conservatism;" and so it says that "we are told from time to time that a great deal of nonsense is said about corporate greed and trust oppression." The Public Ledger says that there can be no doubt that considerable nonsense is said, but it adds that "when the consumer looks at the situation brought about by the anthracite coal combination, he begins to feel that there is, at least, one trust which justifies the most vigorous criticism."

The Public Ledger's editorial is so interesting that the greater portion of it is here reproduced. That republican paper says:

Coal is coming from the mines faster than the consumer will buy it; coal is piled up in the storage yards; coal everywhere, and yet the price of coal has jumped in two sharp bounds a clear dollar a ton in the past few years. Here is an anomaly which would stagger Adam Smith: A glut in the coal market and a famine to the consumer; for it is indeed true, as a Wilkesbarre operator said in yesterday's Public Ledger, "anthracite is becoming a luxury."

Of course, there is only one thing for the coal trust to do under the circumstances; reduce the price of coal to a reasonable figure and sell it? Not by any means; keep the price up to the sordid exaction of \$6.75 and shut down the mines, and if the people cannot afford to buy it, let them use electricity or go to Florida for the winter. But is it not said there is no trust? Let the wise, and even the simple, look at the spectacle of the coal operators closing down mines in unison to curtail production; the beautiful unanimity with which they advance the price 10 cents a ton each month during the summer; the delightful harmony with which they have raised the price of coal 50 cents a ton after each of the recent strikes; how, finally, they have made the last high price permanent, and then judge. Supply and demand? The mines are to be shut down, and coal is maintained at a permanent price \$1 a ton higher than it was a few years ago, and then it was high.

Coal operators do not deign as a usual thing to tell why prices of coal are high, but in a general way the public finds out that the operators have a policy of making the consumers pay for strikes. After the 1900 strike coal was advanced 50 cents a ton. Two or three months of this extraordinary additional profit would pay for any losses connected with any strike. The months wore on, and the consumer found that the 50 cents extra was a fixture. The annual production of anthracite was then from 55,000,000 to 60,000,000 tons, and the consumers began to contribute an added profit of anywhere from \$20,000,000 to \$30,000,000 a year. The 1902 strike followed, and although the operators were collecting an exorbitant price for coal from the public an additional 50 cents went on top of the former "penalty," which the public must pay. The production is now 60,000,000 tons. There was a 10 per cent increase in miners' wages and other slight increases, which make the cost of production a little higher—a few cents a ton, perhaps—and the coal trust is exacting annually a dollar a ton on 60,000,000 tons from the American public more than was paid previous to the two strikes. What would the consumer do if there should be another strike or two?

It has been suggested that the coal trust has no right anyway to make the public pay for its strikes, even if it were exacting only the few millions which the strikes actually cost. What a futile suggestion! What has right or justice got to do with the conduct of a "gentlemen's agreement?"

The president of the United States intervened in the last coal strike, appointed a wise and able commission, and settled the trouble to the great benefit of the suffering public.

He has been criticised for doing an admirable thing because it was extra-constitutional. Since then a new department of commerce and labor has been created, and one of its departments is called the bureau of corporations, whose duty it is to investigate and report on greedy trusts which oppress the people, in order that the congress and the executive may have guidance for action. What better beginning could the bureau of corporations make than with the coal trust, which has an entire monopoly and enforces it? If there was need for the president to intervene in 1902, when he had no constitutional warrant, is there not now stronger reasons why the bureau should get to work in the coal field and crush the monopoly by the strong hand of the law?

The coal consumers of the country do not need assurances from newspapers that they are being imposed upon; and the editorial in the Public Ledger is important largely because of the fact that it may serve as an illustration of the disinclination of republican newspapers to advise practical and effective methods in dealing with influential lawbreakers.

Let the reader carefully observe the striking picture which the Public Ledger draws of the inconveniences and the sufferings to which the coal consumers of the country are subjected because of the greed of the coal barons. That republican paper admits that under the manipulation of the coal barons, we find "a glut in the coal market and a famine to the consumer." It admits that, not because of any scarcity in coal, but rather because of the greed of the coal barons that "anthracite is becoming a luxury."

In all seriousness, so it seems, the Public Ledger invites the attention of the people to "the spectacle of the coal operators closing down mines in unison to curtail production; the beautiful unanimity with which they advance the price 10 cents a ton each month during the summer; the delightful harmony with which they have raised the price of coal 50 cents a ton after each of the recent strikes; how, finally, they have made the last high price permanent." And then the Public Ledger shows that these coal barons have devised a plan for making the coal consumers pay the expenses of all the coal strikes.

In recognition of this situation what has the Public Ledger to offer by way of suggesting a remedy? Having displayed its indignation, the Public Ledger directs attention to the fact that a new department of commerce and labor has been created; that "one of its departments is called the bureau of corporations whose duty it is to investigate and report on greedy trusts which oppress the people, in order that the congress and the executive may have guidance for action;" and the Public Ledger says: "If there was need for the president to intervene in 1902, when he had no constitutional warrant, is there not now stronger reason why the bureau should get to work in the coal field and crush the monopoly by the strong hand of the law?"

Is it not strange that this republican paper should call for an investigation by a bureau created less than a year ago and insist that this bureau "should get to work in the coal field and crush the monopoly by the strong hand of the law?"

How does it happen that this republican paper overlooks the very first clause in the Sherman anti-trust law? That clause provides for criminal prosecution of the trust magnates. Inasmuch as the Public Ledger, with all of its conservatism, has deemed it necessary to draw what in its own vernacular might be called "a populist description" of the situation, so far as concerns the coal trust, is it not strange, if not indeed significant,

that that paper entirely overlooks the most effective weapon within the reach of the authorities, namely, the criminal clause of the federal anti-trust law?

There is no occasion for long drawn out investigation. There is no occasion for pathetic appeals to bureaus. There is no occasion for congressional inquiries. The Public Ledger itself has well described the impositions which the coal trust places upon the consumers. Every intelligent man understands the situation. The facts are readily within the reach of the federal department of justice. Let Mr. Roosevelt instruct his attorney general to commence proceedings against these coal barons under the criminal clause of the Sherman anti-trust law and those proceedings would do more to provide relief to the people and to bring these wealthy anarchists to their senses than all the investigations and all the inquiries that could be put on foot through the combined influences of the department of commerce and of labor and of congress.

If the Public Ledger really believes that the authorities "should get to work in the coal field and crush the monopoly by the strong hand of the law," let the Public Ledger insist that Mr. Roosevelt direct his attorney general to proceed under the very simple and effective plan of criminal indictment as amply provided for in the chief feature of the federal anti-trust law.

If the Public Ledger is not willing to advise a resort to criminal prosecution, it might, at least, inform its readers as to its reasons for ignoring that very effective weapon in dealing with influential lawbreakers.

Money in Old Clothes.

In another column The Commoner reproduces an interesting editorial from the Detroit Times. That editorial is entitled "Wouldn't you like to issue money on your old clothes?" Those republicans who imagine that the republican party can do no wrong and that every policy which that party undertakes must be in line with public interests should carefully read the Detroit Times' editorial.

A Detroit reader of The Commoner calls attention to this editorial and writes: "The Times has not been noted for putting itself in sympathy with the free coinage idea and has never shown any partiality for the principles enunciated by the Kansas City platform, and yet there is much hope for the editor of that paper when he could get on the right side of any subject pertaining to the currency as he has got in this case."

Education.

The attention of young men and young women is directed to the offer made by The Commoner, which offer places a college education within the reach of every young reader of this paper. Information concerning this offer will be found in another column of this issue and further details will be provided upon application to this office. The publisher of The Commoner will be gratified if a large number of young men and young women avail themselves of this opportunity to obtain an education.

Democratic Clubs Organized.

The Jefferson League of Indiana; Mr. Edgar L. Maines of Zionsville, Ind., president; Mr. Claude G. Bowers, Terre Haute, Ind., secretary.

The Bryan Democratic club, Clarks Hill, Ind.; 64 members enrolled; Mr. A. F. Yeamen, president; Mr. Clyde Richards, secretary.

Jefferson Democratic club, Barre, Vt.; 39 members; Mr. Geo. N. Tilden, President; Mr. G. H. Pape, secretary.

Jefferson Democratic club, Vail, Ia.; Mr. Joa. Pieper, president; Mr. S. A. Kral, secretary.